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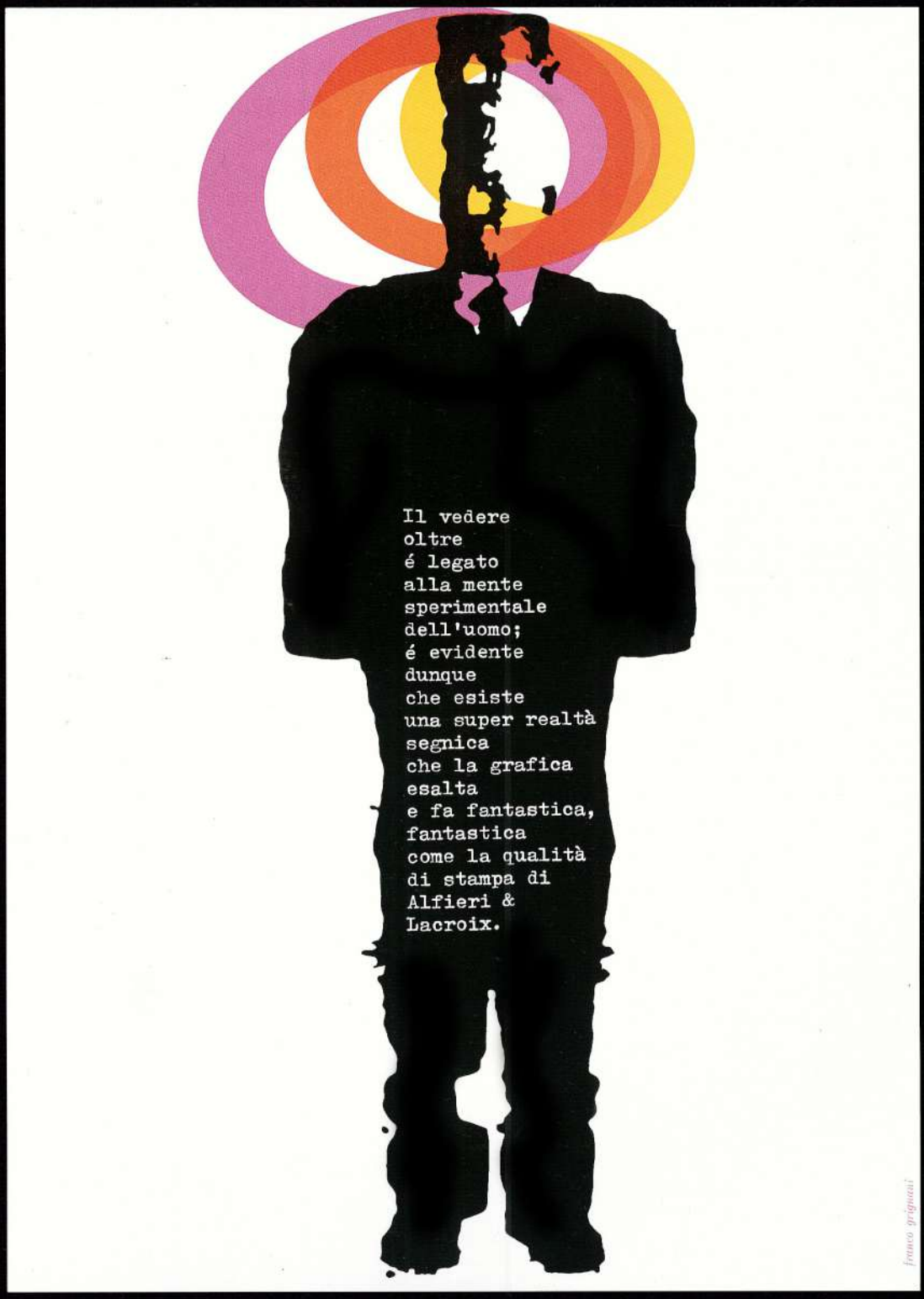
HQ

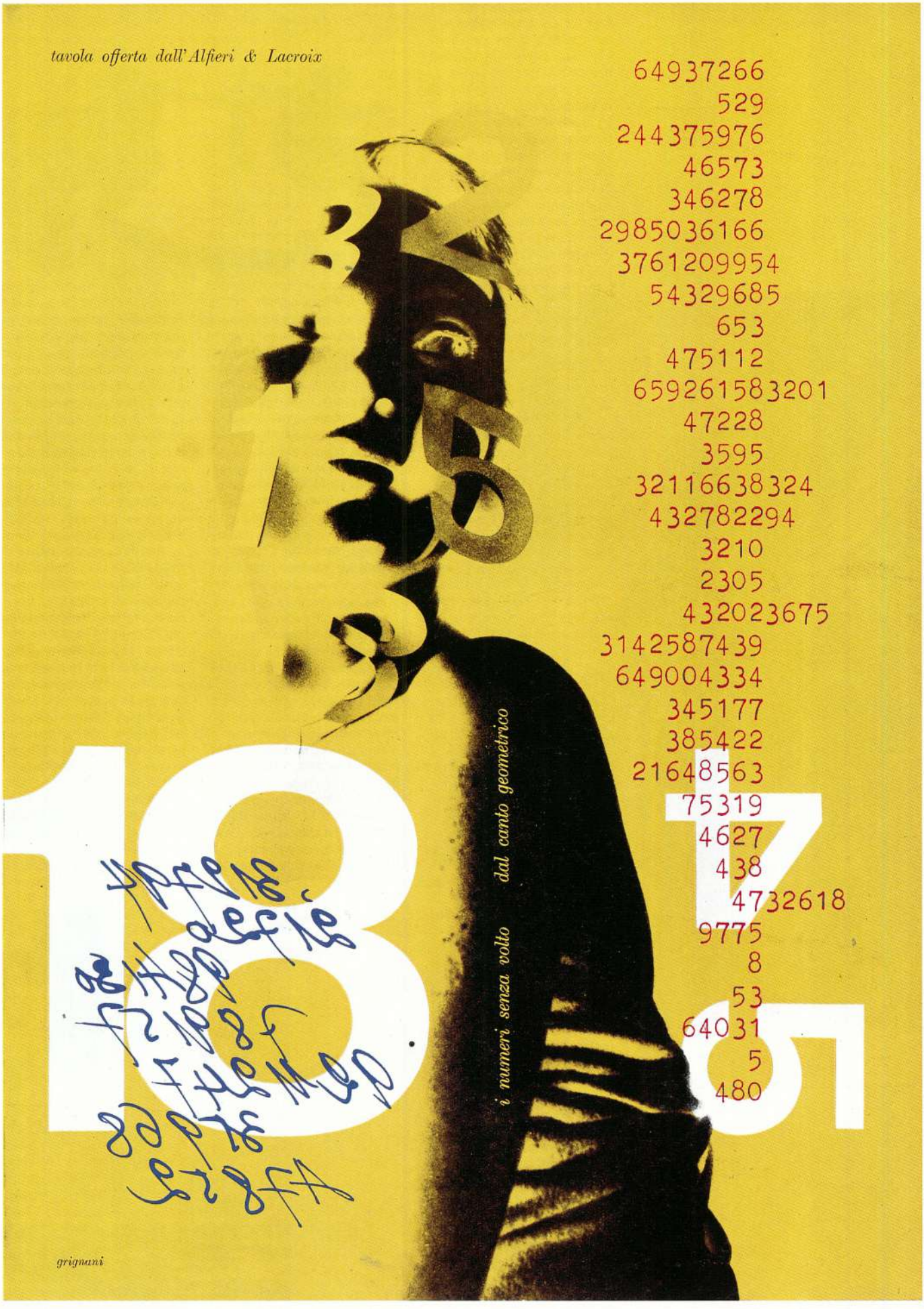
Whodunit?



1967

1957

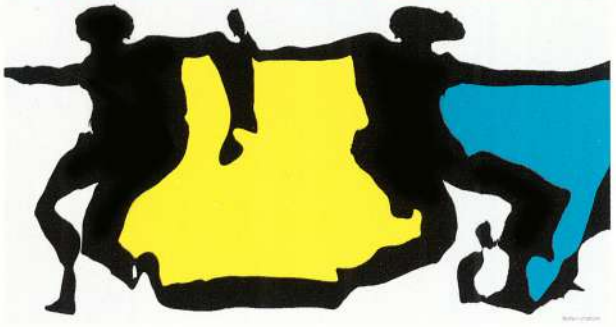
tavola offerta dall'Alfieri & Lacroix



grignani

The Primacy of *Gestaltung*
by Sergio Polano

When discussing graphic design, we are actually always faced with artifacts, i.e. – literally – with things which have been made through an art, with the expression of a craftsmanship guided by a goal or an ideal (which distinguishes these artifacts from the "tools" of animals other than man). These artifacts have a double, positively ambiguous nature, a kind of Janus face. As a matter of fact, artifacts are prostheses, extensions and potentiations of our body. All human tools may be interpreted in this way, from the first stone modified to make a handy weapon on up, and including architecture, a structure/enclosure to protect bodies and social life, and onward to cities and civilization, the fruit of collective life under common rules – accepted, imposed, handed down. Artifacts are at the same time expressions of human ideas, wills, desires, needs for communication and memory, which gave birth to history. History in itself differs from memory: it requires distance, separation rather than the participation and inclusion that memory entails. This is the context in which what we commonly call art should be considered, taken here in the broad sense to include both the major arts (with architecture as the supreme art, the only one capable of including the others in a higher unity: sculpture, painting, etc.) as well as the so-called applied, decorative, minor and/or industrial arts, under which heading graphic design is generally to be found. We can therefore say that tools have a communicative significance (they talk to us, we don't just use them) and that there is a performance aspect to the arts (we use them and don't merely and exclusively appreciate/enjoy them "aesthetically") or that the form is a tool and always has a meaning, a communication background/reason. And is the form not originally in itself an ornament, i.e., an expressive/functional supplementing of nature's materials, something man has given to nature, a projection of his mind to reach and embody a meaning? Without the configuration of form, the artifacts simply do not exist: a handful of clay taken from the earth becomes a vase only because man has given the clay a form by transforming the absence of form/meaning into an artifact through the act of molding a shape, i.e., ornamenting, decorating matter which is thus liberated from the natural state. The raw matter needs to be


La comunicazione pubblicitaria si innesta su esperienze sensoriali vissute e catalogate lungo l'arco di vita di un individuo e tracce formali interferiscono le une con le altre in base alla loro somiglianza, talvolta può l'ambiguità strutturale di certi segni grafici impiegati come reattivo generare infinite interpretazioni, ma una realtà viva semplice esatta è la qualità nella stampa di Alfieri e Lacroix.

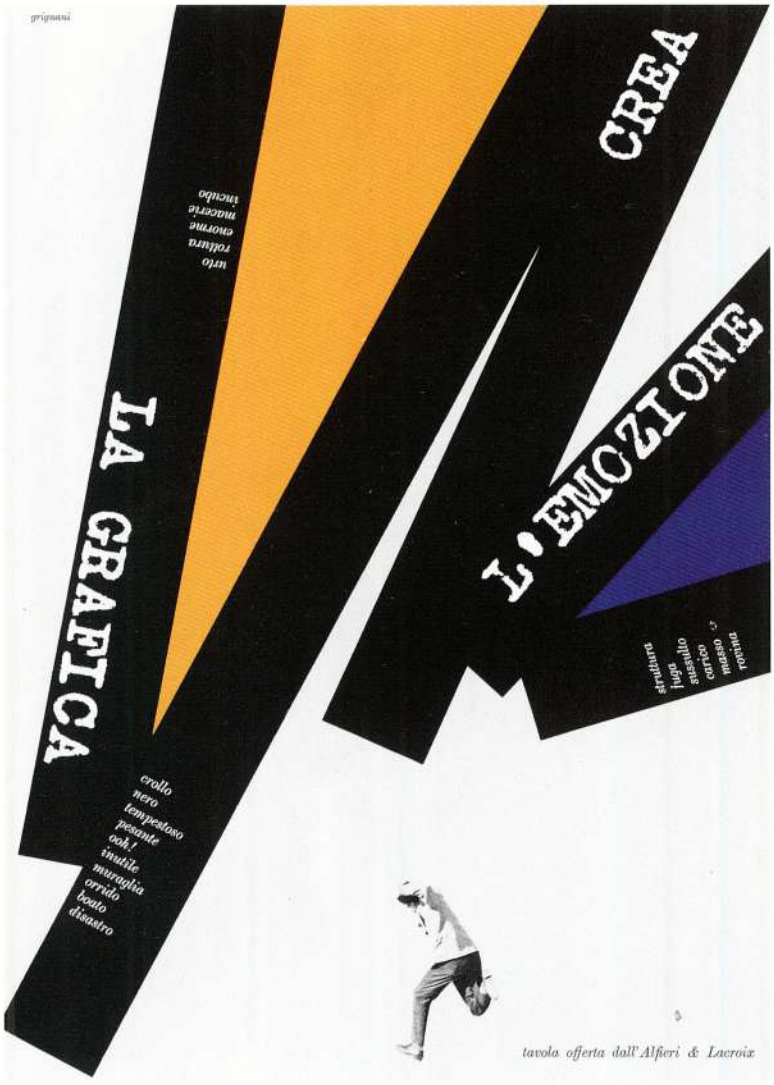
ornamented, to take on form, to become an artifact, to be part of the human legacy of history and the "structured" environment: it needs *gestaltung*.

It should be pointed out at this juncture that the actual material history of our artifacts is a long history of changing relationships, mutual exchanges, happy anachronisms, and great anticipations, between "carving," "tracking," "signing" tools (implying varying attitudes/gestures) and their "media" or "carriers": stone and chisel, clay and stick, wax and stylus, wall/wood/canvas and dipped brush, paper and pencil/chalk/watercolor/charcoal, ancient, artisanal (manufactured in limited quantity and thus expensive) papyrus or parchment and inked quill, modern and (from the Renaissance on) more and more industrially manufactured paper and inked plate, paper and toner charged by a laser beam, silver-emulsion film beamed by light, and now monitor (a light-emitting glass screen coated with phosphoric pixels) and electronic beam. Approaching the matter in this way, we conclude that the "content" of art, its problematic, intimate nature, has always been "how" the artifacts are made and not "what" they represent. From a creative perspective, which must be postulated in order to fully understand what pushes and urges man to create, to express himself, the *gestaltung* process objectivates the contents of artistic memories, needs, desires, dreams, and fantasies in form/matter. In our time another (r)evolution in the relations of tools/media has taken place, the advent of the digital era over or rather after the analog one, but our mentality and cultural habits too often seem to be a barrier, a borderline, a powerful but static protective device which evolves more slowly than the technology itself. It seems clear that the new medium is the screen (whatever resolution it may have, and it is easy to predict that it will develop to ever higher definitions and will combine with television, cinema, radio, computer technology to form new media). The new tool is

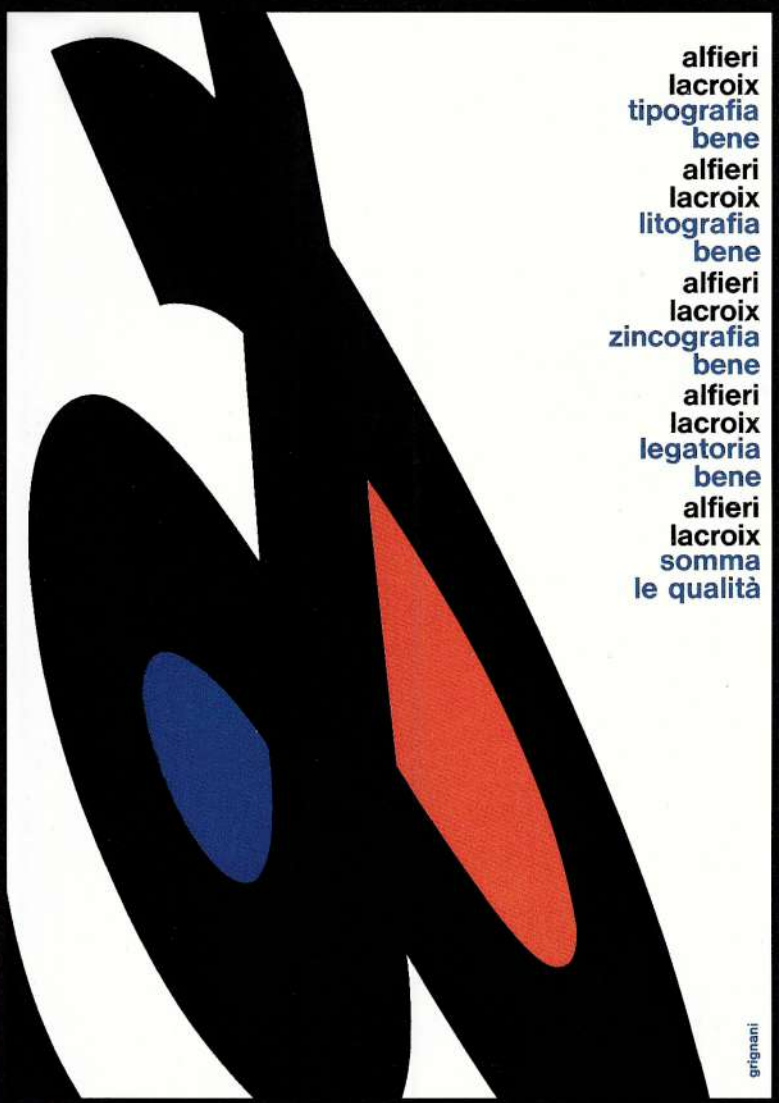
light, the beams that energize the phosphoric dots disseminated on a glass screen. So the present challenge in the field of visual/graphic design, the border soon to be properly crossed (before somebody with no specific training/tradition but more audacity takes over this digital Wild West) seems to be the integration/coördination of sound and movement that gives a new dynamic/acoustic dimension to the "bit" page (the proper term for the screen in this context, is it not?), thus giving the designer a new unseen dimension, an additional depth, in comparison to the relation between type/text and images/pictures on the "atomic" paper we are all familiar with, and a greater (albeit dangerous) freedom of manipulating/treating the images/texts. History most probably never repeats itself, but it is a useful metaphor to say that we are in a kind of new Renaissance: the old one started with the (r)evolution of printing, and now we are crossing over to the digital (r)evolution, which is already and once again connected with the transmission/communication/conservation of events and ideas. But we don't yet really know about that and perhaps aren't yet fully aware of all its implications, but at any rate, we are definitely headed somewhere! Never before have designers had such powerful tools in their own hands, provided they still use the tool number one, a grey jelly kept safe in a marvelously designed packaging – our brain, our mind. Designers should not miss this chance and surrender in a competition that is a kind of selective evolution, as cruel and unsafe as any evolutionary process. Otherwise they will disappear.

The selected works of Franco Grignani* shown on these pages prove once and for all the primacy of the mind, of conception, of the *gestaltung* process for visual design: a true artist is one who is able to dream and build the tools of his work, independently of the actual media, standing on the past and looking to the future.

*A past master, the Italian visual designer, painter, and photographer Franco Grignani was born in Pieve Porto Morone (Pavia) in 1908 and studied architecture at the Turin Polytechnic from 1929 to 1933. After participating as a painter in the late or second Futurist movement, his artistic searching brought him to the European abstract avant-garde movements. He developed a strong interest in the perception psychology of form, which resulted, in the fifties, in his dynamic anticipation of what would later be called OpArt. The mastering of perception rules is expressed by his visual experiments on virtual movement, optical illusion, subperceptions, distortions, moirés, dilatations, *flous,* and so on, carried over, with no concessions, from painting to graphic design, through pictures, images, patterns, signs, and words. From the thirties he worked in the field of graphic design with Borletti, Breda Nardi, Cremona Nuova, Dompé, Domus, Mondadori, Montecatini, Spi, Triennale. His artistic direction for the Alfieri & Lacroix printing company is particularly interesting, as it shows an exceptional integration of words (his own) and images. Very well known is his trademark for lambswool, a paradigmatic example of his approach to symbol design. For 26 years he has been art director of *Pubblicità in Italia,* a magazine devoted to Italian advertising and visual design. He has written many essays on design and the arts and lectured in Europe and the U.S.



1963 1962



Almost no one knows that the sign for "Pure Virgin Wool" was designed by Franco Grignani in 1963.

Nuovi procedimenti
tecnici e psicologici
si stanno inserendo
nel nuovo
linguaggio grafico
perché l'occhio,
già eccitato da forme
e da immagini
del mondo che lo circonda,
sappia catturare un segno.
La componente dinamica
e tensiva con il suo
assorbimento visuale,
carica il segno
di un moto apparente.
Questo problema
di creatività grafica
ha bisogno di una grande
qualità riproduttiva:
Alfieri & Lacroix!
grignani